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PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE ADAPTATION OF 4-H CLUB WORK IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The attempt to introduce the 4-H Club work to other countries needs to consider beforehand the wide range of situations, conditions, long-established customs, institutional and governmental policies, and educational procedure in those countries.

The 4-H Club work of the United States is a distinctive phase of informal educational activities of rural youth, growing out of the American way of life, and meeting the needs of segments of American people. This type of rural youth activities represents a phase of American culture and is a product of social life in rural America.

The cardinal principle governing the adaptation of 4-H Club work in other lands is the recognition of local needs and taking all necessary steps to adjust the new system to meet these needs.

Several points for consideration are raised in the following paragraphs. These may provide suggestions and possible guidance for similar educational experiments in other countries.

4-H Club Work Teaches More Than Agriculture and Home Economics

There are other activities and values in 4-H Club work than the learning of agricultural and homemaking practices. These other activities have a great influence in developing the character of boys and girls. No 4-H Club work can be considered complete unless the broader ideals and teachings are developed to the fullest. 4-H Clubs teach the finer things in rural life. They develop in young people those ideals and attitudes that mark an upstanding manhood and womanhood. They uphold the dignity of individuality, encourage free participation and free exchange of ideas, emphasize group responsibility and community differences, and respect for the laws of the majority. These are the enduring values of 4-H Club work. Even though in the area where agriculture is poor and the opportunities of agricultural projects are limited, club work can still exert its influence and contribute towards constructive development of rural leadership.

Beginning With Something Simple

Immediate objectives for youth work should be limited. Existing economic levels and cultural differences usually limit the scope of operation and change or modify the initial approach.

The beginnings of 4-H Club work in the United States were on a small scale, a Junior Naturalist Club here, a Corn Club for boys and a Canning Club for girls there. At first, public funds were not drawn upon. It was after the enactment of the Smith-Lever Law in 1914 that Federal funds were made available to the States and that the operation of this system became Nation-wide in scope.

It is advisable to start with something small, as a small beginning has the advantage of educating and preparing the public to understand the purpose and objectives of such a new youth organization. Public interest, and public awareness of the problems and of the need for doing more in educating rural youth, will take time to develop. Concentrated efforts in small operation could bring better results to convince people than large-scale operation. Furthermore, a small beginning can make best use of the resources available, thus preventing economic waste. In most underdeveloped countries, family income is small, land is scarce, instruments for farm work and facilities for homemaking are always poor and primitive. Selection of projects, therefore, requires careful consideration, since most people cannot afford to divert their limited cash income, raw material, and limited area of production to club work. Indeed, many youth activities in the beginning may of necessity be confined to those which fall within the prevailing subsistence economical level. Another reason for a small beginning lies in the fact that good leadership for youth work must be found and trained; and finding and training leaders is not easy and requires time.

Stressing Flexibility of Adaptation

4-H Club work has a high degree of flexibility which makes possible its adaptation in many other countries. In Puerto Rico, for instance, individual farm holdings are generally quite small, and all grains and concentrated feeds must be imported. 4-H members found it difficult to establish the poultry, dairy, and livestock projects so common in continental United States. However, in girls' 4-H Club work, sewing, clothing, health improvement, food preparation, gardening, and home improvement are widely popular. Even in the United States, 4-H Club work has to be modified to meet general poor farm situations and low income.

The state of agricultural development becomes of major importance for consideration. The United States system has the support of a highly industrialized and mechanized type of agriculture. Instruments and equipment for local experiments and demonstrations are available. In other countries, the conditions are different. It may be necessary to modify the system to deal not immediately with agriculture as such but with the broader aspects of community life. Literacy, health and citizenship were emphasized by the Chinese Mass Education Movement as early phases of youth work. In Egypt young people take recreation and social services as their projects. The organization of the Three F Club (Food for Family Fitness) in Jamaica, the Future Farmers of Greece and the organization of school farms and gardens by the Department of Agriculture in cooperation with Education Departments in many British Colonies, are examples of flexibility of adaptation.

Requirements of daily living differ from one country to another. Youth activities must be pursued in conformity with these requirements. Vegetarian tradition, superstition, and prejudices of certain people many delay the project for certain kinds of livestock, but substitutes are to be found; for instance, organization of consumer cooperatives, vaccination campaigns, and reforestation, as promoted by many youth groups in China.

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The selection and interpretation of symbols and ceremonies for youth organization should be flexible to conform with the different value systems operating in different countries. The creed, pledge, and motto adopted by the 4-H Clubs in the United States are parts of American value systems, growing out of American cultural background. Other countries may or may not regard these as useful and applicable.

Recognizing Cultural Differences

Here additional points concerned with cultural differences may be mentioned. Take the question of age limits. In the United States, the age limit is set between 10 and 21. The Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Canada follow the same practice. In Britain, however, the Young Farmers Club is open to boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 25. There are four types of clubs: Senior clubs for members 15 to 25 years of age; junior clubs for members 10 to 15 years of age; general clubs with junior and senior sections; and school clubs. In the early days of the Chinese Mass Education Movement children's clubs were organized for those who were under 14 years of age, and Young People's Associations for those who were between 14 and 25 years of age. Or take the question of maturity: Which age is to be regarded as the point of maturity? Adulthood in the United States begins at 21. Other countries regard 10 to 18 as the age of maturity, when the full man's responsibility is assumed. Social obligations (and to a certain extent biological phenomena) may make young people reaching 16 or 18 years of age shun any youth clubs, feeling out of place with the younger groups. The coeducational nature of 4-H Club work in the United States is another matter worth looking into. Some countries, following their traditional practice, may want to separate boys from girls, especially during the adolescent period. the age-long discrimination against the females may also discourage young girls from participating in this new youth organization where both sexes take equally active parts in its activities. Care must be taken, therefore, to lay certain ground work, not only in setting and testing this new organization, but also in social and cultural preparation, making sure the time for public acceptance is ripe.

Reliance on Local Lay Leaders

The importance of training leaders for youth work has been alluded to. To rely on local lay leaders is a well-established principle in the United States. This has been made possible largely because of the accumulated experiences of a large number of adults who previously have enlisted in either 4-H Clubs or other farm organizations. The back log of competent and experienced workers has been there. The situation in other countries may be different. Local leaders may not be easily found. Even practical farmers in most instances are likely to be reticent to help because of the novelty of the scheme. When this initial difficulty has been overcome; it is necessary to train local leaders slowly but steadily on a sound basis.

Family as a Unit

In most folk society, the family is an organic unit of production and consumption. Moreover, it is a social unit held together by long tradition

and by undivided loyalty to kinship relations. The idea of youth's ownership, while acceptable to the United States, may not be regarded as feasible in other countries. The patriarchal head of the family in Greece, for instance, has not been inclined to permit his son to have individual home projects. Fukien Christian University, in Foochow, China, once organized a Young Farmers' Club in the nearby village, Hui-Gei. The only possible way of inducing the young people to experiment with Irish potatoes was to give them a lot on the university farm, together with potato seeding and fertilizers. None of the families of these young people had more than 3 acres of cropland to support an average of six persons. Since land was scarce and precious, it was impossible to incorporate club work with the family farm and have the young people take full charge of their individual interests.

Initiating a Program

The authority and responsibility of organizing youth work need careful definition. The Department of Agriculture may take the initiative as its main concern is with rural people. However, if and when a government is not yet ready to accept the responsibility, initiative might properly be exercised by any group recognizing the needs and having the facilities. This principle was accepted by the delegates attending a Technical Meeting on Agricultural Extension in Turrialba, Costa Rica, in 1949. Other countries in other regions may have different ideas. Private agencies serving in many parts of the world have already made successful experiments in the youth field. Though extension work with rural youth is assumed to be a public function, private agencies should not be excluded; indeed they should be encouraged to share the responsibility as much as possible.

The Role of the College of Agriculture

4-H Clubs operate under the leadership of the extension services of the State Colleges of agriculture in the United States. The United States system of combining experiments, extension, and resident teaching in one single institution has worked well and has been adopted with good results in other places. In introducing this system to another country, however, one needs to consider the existing educational structure, the available resources of personnel and funds, the political elements usually entering into establishment of educational institutions, and the current attitudes of the people toward this new type of educational institution. There is a danger in arbitrarily assigning the role of youth work to agricultural colleges, as this step may disrupt the existing educational programs when the other institutions having provision for similar educational training are deprived of such opportunities. The reactions of many Chinese educators to the recommendation of the China-United States Agricultural Mission in 1947 to give agricultural colleges the sole responsibility of Agricultural Extension Service is a good illustration. It seems reasonable to suggest that before realizing the long-term objective of recruiting extension workers strictly from the graduates of the agricultural colleges, all other qualified educational institutions should be called upon to help, with no discrimination against them.

Selecting Market Towns as Experimental Spots of 4-H Club Work

Market towns as trade centers are found in most countries; they usually serve as centers of information. Local leaders can be found in the market towns where they exert certain influences on the surrounding villages. Their advice and consultation are sought in time of need. It seems advisable and profitable to select a few market towns as experimental spots of youth work. In these towns, government extension agents may be stationed and the local resources may be utilized to support a simple youth activities. When these experiments are successful, other measures with greater scope might be proposed later for more extensive application.

The Policy of Nonpartisanship

Extension work in the United States is politically nonpartisan, and so is 4-H Club work. No political lines are to be found, and no segments of the population are to be excluded. Local option and local responsibility provide the ideal situation for the training and organization of rural youth as a part of the Extension Service. In other countries, political consideration may enter into the organization of youth groups. Possible danger may arise from too much governmental control, causing a loss of the independent character of freedom-loving young people.

The presence of this distinguished group of rural youth leaders to observe and study the rural youth organization in the United States, supports the belief that the time is at hand to organize and utilize effectively and purposefully, the youth energy and enthusiasm for the improvement of the living conditions of the rural population of the world. "In my estimation," said Dr. F. T. Wahlen, Director of the Agriculture Division of FAO, in his address to the Twentieth National 4-H Club Camp in Washington, 1950, "youth enthusiasm and pluck are two of the greatest assets any individual has during his lifetime. Only she or he who possesses them feels that our whole life is one challenge, and not a dreary sequence of episodes. To make constructive use of this youthful vigor, one must have ideals." The importance of upholding these ideals, however different their expressions are in different countries, cannot be overemphasized. This Open House will promote continuous friendly relations between rural youth workers in the various countries and strengthen the will for world peace and cooperation.

